

Message Text

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43

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAM-01

SAB-01 TRSE-00 IO-10 AID-05 /071 W

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R 071420Z APR 75

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7943

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

/AMCONSUL BOMBAY 8210

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 4631

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJ: MORARJI DESAI BEGINS FAST

1. SUMMARY: CONGRESS-O POLITICAL MORARJI DESAI HAS STARTED A "FAST UNTO DEATH" IN AN ATTEMPT TO FORCE THE GOI TO HOLD THE LONG-POSTPONED GUJARAT ELECTIONS BY THE END OF MAY. END SUMMARY.

2. ON APRIL 7 MORARJI DESAI, FORMER GOI DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER, TWICE UNSUCCESSFUL CONTESTANT FOR INDIA'S PRIME MINISTERSHIP AND NOW CONGRESS-O LEADER, EMBARKED ON A "FAST UNTO DEATH" AT HIS DELHI HOME. THE 79 YEAR-OLD DESAI ANNOUNCED BEFORE BEGINNING HIS ORDEAL THAT HE WILL RELENT ONLY IF THE GOI PUBLICLY AGREES TO TERMINATE THE PRESIDENT'S RULE AND HOLD ELECTIONS IN HIS HOME STATE OF GUJARAT BEFORE THE END OF MAY. NON-CPI OPPOSITION LEADERS "SUPPORTING THE FAST, AS WELL AS J.P. NARAYAN, HAVE JOINED WITH HIM IN RIDICULING THE GOI'S ARGUMENT THAT THE GUJARAT ADMINISTRATION CANNOT AFFORD TO SWITCH

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ITS EFFORTS OVER TO ORGANIZING ELECTIONS WHILE SEVERE

DROUGHT CONDITIONS PREVAIL IN THE STATE. THEY CHARGE THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS POSTPONING ELECTIONS BECAUSE OF THE CONGRESS PARTY'S WEAK POLITICAL POSTION IN GUJARAT CAUSED BY LAST YEAR'S VIOLENT UPHEAVALS. IN A LAST MINUTE MOVE OVER THE WEEKEND, MRS. GANDHI ATTEMPTED TO DETER DESAI WITH THE ASSURANCE THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD IN GUJARAT "IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE MONSOONS IN SEPTEMBER."

3. DESAI RESPONDED THAT HE IS DETERMINED TO STICE WITH HIS MAY 31 DEADLINE. THE AGING POLITICAL HAS BUILT UP A REPUTATION FOR STUBBORNNESS AND PERSISTENCE OVER HIS FOUR-AND-A-HALF DECADES IN INDIAN PUBLIC LIFE. MOST OBSERVERS DOUBT WHETHER HE WILL COMPROMISE. IF PROLONGED, HIS FAST COULD PRECIPITATE SERIOUS LAW AND ORDER CHALLENGES FOR THE GOI IN GUJARAT AND PERHAPS ELSEWHERE IN INDIA, WHILE PRE-SENTING MRS. GANDHI WITH ONE MORE TROUBLESOME POLITICAL HEADACHE.
SAXBE

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